

Regional Water Quality Control Board

Los Angeles Region

Meeting Transcript December 18, 2025

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CDFW Excerpt with Timecodes from full meeting.

[8:30] Susanna Arradondo (Executive Officer)

Yes. Thank you Chair and vice chair and board for your kind words towards staff. Thank you. Um, before I provide my update, we'll start with a presentation from Erin Wilson Ogin. She's the South Coast Regional Manager with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. She will present on the Bayona Wetlands Restoration Project. The board, um, is welcome to ask questions following that presentation. And then after that presentation, I will have an update on Santana Susanna Field Laboratory. So she is attending. Erin is on virtually. Okay.

[9:05] Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)

Good morning. Morning Board members. Thank you for having me.

[9:09] David Nahai (Chair)

Good morning. Thank you for being here with us.

[9:12] Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)

Um, I have just a short presentation, so, um, just so everybody who doesn't know me, my name's Erin Wilson Ogin. I'm the regional new regional manager, well, not that new anymore, the regional manager for the Department of Fish and Wildlife in the South Coast region. And, um, so I'm just gonna give you a quick update, um, on the Biona wetlands in general. So if you wanna, next slide.

[9:38] Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)

So, um, the Biona Wetlands Restoration Project still does remain a priority for the department. Um, but currently, um, it is on pause. We're, um, not doing any development on the project at this point until we revise, um, the environmental impact report, um, that was required by the court order. Uh, we are still doing, um, our stewardship and our land management and any other outreach activities on the property. Um, next slide.

[10:14] Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)

Uh, we do, we still have community members who continue to express concerns regarding the proposed restoration project. Um, and, um, I continue to encourage stakeholder discussions. Um,

my door is always open to have, um, any kind of public engagement or stakeholder meetings. Um, the department is, um, committed to transparency in this, um, process. Next slide.

[10:42] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

Um, currently we're working on updating, uh, the EIR the two sections that were required by the court order to, to update. We're revising the hydrology section and, um, revising the, the calculations on that. And then, um, we should hopefully, I'm just, I'm gonna say hopefully have public comments on the revised EIR by 2026. I'm not gonna give us specific date at this point because I wanted it done by the end of this year, and that hasn't happened yet. So, um, I'm hopeful to get this done by, um, in 2026. Um, but, um, oh, I can update you guys later if that changes. So, next slide.

[11:29] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

And then the last thing to mention is that, uh, we continue to engage with our fellow tribes. Um, we have a really good relationship with them and have done several projects and coordinated with them on several activities for, um, or interpretive services and signage. Um, we did get a request from the tribe, from the Ngba tribe to initiate, um, an ancestral land return, but that's just in its infancy and we really just haven't started working on that. So, um, all that has just begun. And I, and I think really that's all my updates. I'm expecting you guys to have questions. So, um, that's the end of my presentation.

[12:13] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Um, well, uh, thank you. Um, uh, well, we always do prize brevity, um, so I want to thank you for that. But I, I think, I think that your presentation does give rise to a number of questions, and I will start with other board members who have questions. I know that I have some, I'm okay right now. Go Ahead.

[12:34] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Okay. Uh, board member Mendez, you want to?

[12:37] **Board Member Mendez**

Sure. Just some clarity in terms of, um, the public comment. Is that opening public comment or responding to public comment by 2026? Uh, it was a bit confused by that.

[12:49] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

Oh. So, um, we did the NOPI believe last year, and we did get some public comments and then we had to stop working on the EIR because we, um, ran out of funding with our contractor. And so we've been working internally to address some of those NOP comments, and we hope to release the, um, the draft, uh, public document, the EIS or REIS for public review, um, this year.

[13:16] **Board Member Mendez**

So yes, public comments This year, at the end of this year or beginning of next year?

[13:21] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

I've already, I've already moved on, sorry, 2026.

[13:25] **Board Member Mendez**

Okay. Great. And then you said you lost funding so that, that had been in the public comment. Uh, questions about, um, uh, priority for the department or the, um, uh, the Natural Resources Agency, um, to, uh, to find funding to complete the EIR and this public comment period. Can you tell us what discussions have been with the director or the secretary to, um, find that funding to complete this project?

[13:56] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

Um, in regards to funding for completing the project? We haven't had any conversations yet. Um, because our first priority is to finish the, um, SE document. 'Cause we can't, we Can't, oh, yeah, let me, um, I'm sorry, I I misspoke about the funding for the, the SQL document. Oh, oh. Um, we just felt that it was such a small amount that we need to finish the document, that it was easier for us to prioritize it in, in region and, and use staff time to do it. So, uh, funding has been identified.

[14:24] **Board Member Mendez**

Step Yes. Internally. Yes. Okay.

[14:26] **Board Member Mendez**

Thank, thank you. I'll pass it on to my colleagues. Thank you.

[14:29] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Thank you. Board member Camacho questions from you.

[14:34] **Board Member Camacho**

Uh, yes, I know that you provided the timeline for the EIR revision, but I know that we've had a lot of comments in regards to the NEPA process and, and some of the public comments around, you know, why is nothing happening in regards to that. And so I just wanted to get a better understanding of what you all are doing in terms of the NEPA process.

[14:59] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

So all of that is on hold. Um, a lot of that happened before my, my tenure here started. So, um, my understanding is that, um, the core did not pursue the EIS at this point because they don't have a complete or, um, a construction project that's in enough, um, in a final stage or like, what is it, like 60% design for them to continue. And so at some point when we continue, um, with the project design, then we can go back to the core and engage them in consultation.

[15:34] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

And at that point, when they decide what their, um, federal action will be, then they can do the environmental document for that project, which is how things are done.

[15:47] **Board Member Camacho**

Mm-hmm. And, and so what I'm hearing is that really the progress or the, or the staff that's

needed to push the nepa, uh, document forward is under the Corps's, uh, army Corps of Engineers jurisdiction, right?

[16:04] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

Yep. So every time there's, uh, the permit is the federal action that requires the environmental review. So at that time, when they do have a federal action in front of them, then they would decide what the appropriate document would be.

[16:16] **Board Member Camacho**

Mm-hmm. And has there been any, uh, discussions from the Army Corps of Engineers about, you know, continuing on a lot of projects and programs are being cut at the federal level, and so are there any risks in regards to this current project?

[16:34] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

Y you know, that, that's a really good question. I haven't really engaged the core, um, on this project because I, I wasn't ready to, but, um, I, I just had some conversations about engaging them because, because I haven't. So, um, it is a good question and something I need to look into in 2026 as we move forward. Thank you.

[16:57] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Uh, well, uh, thank you very, very much for taking the time to, to be with us today and to, and, uh, and, and, and for your presentation. And I know that I think you're driving or, or you're probably between meetings and so on, so we, we, we, we appreciate it. Um, I, I have to say though, that that, that I, for one, as a citizen of this area, not as, not as a board member on this, on this body, um, I, I, I found not much comfort in in what it is that you told us. Um, and I, and I, and I know that, that, you know, this hasn't been during your tenure and, and therefore, I'm not saying that you personally, um, shoulder any responsibility here at all. I'm not saying that. Um, but, but you know, when I think members of the public, um, here for like, well, that's on hold, or this is on pause, or, or we're working on deficient sections, or we hope that something will happen in 2026, which is a year, uh, from now, um, uh, you know, people will understandably, uh, hear those comments and, and I think legitimately complain that this is not moving forward with the kind of alacrity and commitment, uh, that I think, um, that I think residents of this region deserves. So, and I'm not saying that this is your responsibility at all, but, but, but I, I think more does need to be done. I'm sure you would agree with that. And my question for you is, uh, as the Regional Water Quality Control Board, what more can we do in order to, in order to assist this process, move forward? We're very much in favor of the restoration plan. We think it is long overdue, and that, and it needs to be pursued, as I said, with, with, with commitment. So perhaps, perhaps you can tell us, or perhaps in discussions with staff, uh, we can get to a point where we can understand what more we can do to, to move this, move this forward. I mean, I, I was, I was honestly, I was hoping in your presentation that we would hear, uh, a kind of more, a more definitive statement of, of timelines and, and, you know, and, and actions and milestones and so on. And I understand you are not able to, to provide that. So I want to thank you, but I

hope that we can, we can do more here together to, to satisfy what are really legitimate concerns on the part of the public about what is happening with Bona. So, and if any, any other comments from board members?

[19:56] **Board Member Mendez**

Yeah, I'd just like, again, like to reiterate that this, uh, as our chair, uh, vice chair and, um, my fellow board member Camacho have all stated that this is a priority for us as a board, and we care, uh, deeply, um, as, uh, ensuring that these water bodies are, are repaired. Um, there's adequate, um, opportunity for stewardship, um, co-management stewardship with tribal nations and, uh, groups. And we, we really look forward to an opportunity to work as partners. We are your peers, we are lateral peers. Um, but we would like to know how we could, uh, move forward. And, you know, if this is, uh, something that, um, our chair and eos, uh, need to work with the director and the secretary with, I think that possibly that might be another avenue to have a meeting between, um, the, the principles, uh, between our board, the agency and, and the department perhaps.

[20:56] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

I think that would be great. Uh, I, I, I can't, I can't agree more about the frustration and the disappointment in how slow this is going as well. I, I do understand your concerns and I appreciate your support. I've been working with your staff quite a bit the last couple months and trying to, uh, find solutions for funding. I think that's gonna be the biggest issue moving forward is funding for obvious reasons. But I appreciate your support. Alright, thank you. Thank you very much.

[21:25] **David Nahai (Chair)**

I know that Jenny, did you have a comment?

[21:30] **Jenny Newman (Staff)**

Yes, chair now. Hi, uh, Jenny Newman. I wanted to respond to your request that staff offer some solution to offer our help to Fish and Wildlife to move forward. And, um, staff could, um, could draft a letter to initiate this process, uh, that, that board member Mendez brought up. We could draft a letter to Fish and Wildlife enumerating the, um, the requirements of the TMDL for the Bayona wetlands and the board's desire to implement that TMDL as soon as possible. Um, and, um, and put forward a, a, a timeline or a schedule that, that we think is reasonable. Um, I hear that, um, that Ms. Ogen Wilson, you know, said that they've identified they, and she's correct. We've been, as she said, trying to find external sources of funding to help complete the EIR and we've been unsuccessful. And so Fish and Wildlife is gonna use internal resources, um, to, to complete the EIR, she said. Um, so maybe if we, if we wrote a letter to Fish and Wildlife, um, you know, explaining the board's strong desire to move forward at a, at a, at a faster pace, um, that might help. Uh, and I would be interested in hearing what, uh, Aaron's response to that was, or, or your response chair nahai, if you think that would be a good idea or we could propose, you know, something else to, to make your wishes known.

[23:00] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Um, yeah, I do think, I don't think that would be a, a, a good idea. I also think that board members, board member Mendez's idea about, about possibly having an in-person meeting with, with maybe, you know, an ad hoc committee of, of the board with Fish and Wildlife, um, maybe, maybe a way to try to move things forward, uh, as, as well in, so, so I think, I think we can, we can explore a couple of options, but thank you very much for that. I, I think that letter would be, would be helpful and I think it would, it may be helpful to Fish and Wildlife as well to have that in the record. It just, uh, you know, the expression of a strong desire, uh, to move forward on this. So, you know, we can, we can talk about, uh, various options, but thank you very much for that.

[24:03] **David Nahai (Chair)**

And Ms. Aradondo? No. Okay. But we, uh, Norma Okay. Oh, I see, I see a hand up. Yes, go ahead. Board member.

[24:08] **Board Member Camacho**

Yeah, and, and just one thing I I wanna emphasize is that after we do get this meeting and get ourselves, um, much more organized, um, in terms of timelines and expectations, we really do, or I think as Fish and Wildlife really needs to begin a conversation with the Army Corps of Engineers asap. Um, and, and to know if there are any changes in their commitment to this project would be vital. Um, before we spend a lot of time moving forward, we may have to go a totally different route if they do change their, uh, their commitment. So, uh, again, getting the, uh, revision of the EIR is just the tip of the iceberg of things that need to get done. Thank you.

[25:02] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Agree.

[25:05] **David Nahai (Chair)**

And Jen, Jenny and I had talked about doing that and, uh, reaching out to the core so we can do that, um, in early 2026.

[25:12] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Alright, well thank you very, very much for your time, for, for speaking with us today. So appreciated. And hopefully there'll be, uh, more conversations to come and more actions, uh, to come as well.

[25:26] **Erin Wilson Ogen (CDFW)**

Thanks so much For having me.

[25:27] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Thank you for having me. Anytime. Thank you.

[25:29] **David Nahai (Chair)**

Okay, go back to the EOS report.